

Album Reviews: Marc Bolan tribute, Kathleen Edwards and Fast Romantics

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AngelHeaded Hipster: The Songs of Marc Bolan and T. Rex

Various artists (produced by Hal Willner)

BMG

AngelHeaded Hipster arrives as a tribute to the corkscrew-haired genius of Marc Bolan, as intended, but also as an unplanned salute to its producer Hal Willner, who worked on this project for years until his COVID-related death in April. Like Willner's previous tributes (among them, to Thelonious Monk, Kurt Weill and Disney

music), Hipster is ambitious and often ingenious, demonstrating not only passion for his subject but also his artistic fearlessness and wide-ranging musical tastes.

The two-album set spans Bolan's entire career: Roughly a third of these 26 songs come from T-Rex's commercial twin peaks of 1971's *Electric Warrior* and its followup, *The Slider*; another third from his folkier, pre-glam 1966-1970 era; and the rest covers 1973-77 when Bolan's musical powers remained strong in the face of the public's waning T-Rextasy.

Bold song choices: 1966 single *Hippy Gumbo* is here from Beth Orton; *Telegram Sam* and *20th Century Boy* are MIA. Willner's quality control ensures Hipster's hit-to-miss ratio heavily favours the former, and the record works best when Bolan and the artists' personalities find room to co-exist. Nick Cave wrings existential rumination from a funereal *Cosmic Dancer*. Marc Almond revisits the themes of *Soft Cell's Youth* as he dramatically emotes a boldly arranged, *Sketches of Spain*-flavoured *Teenage Dream*. Peaches distills the stomping glam of *Solid Gold, Easy Action* into a minimalist electro throb. Devendra Banhart inhabits the dream-folk womb of *Scenesof*. Todd Rundgren reimagines *Planet Queen* as psychedelic swing. Vocal stylists like BORN'S (Dawn Storm) and Metric's Emily Haines (*Ballrooms of Mars*) remind us that, like his glam contemporary David Bowie, Bolan's indelible melodies rarely followed predictable trajectories.



A few acts, such as Kesha (*Children of the Revolution*), Joan Jett (*Jeepster*) and Sean Lennon/Charlotte Kemp Muhl (*Mambo Sun*), don't veer far from the peerless originals, while the only misfires come from Nena (a lifeless *Metal Guru*) and U2 and Elton John, whose collaboration on *Bang a Gong* is neither dirty nor sweet and sounds like an *Escape Club* b-side. Hit the skip button on those and Hipster will have you dancing with your lizard leather boots on.

— David Veitch